

## CLAIMS

I (we) claim:

1           1.     In a public computer network connecting a buyer organization and two  
2 or more supplier computers each having a browser, wherein the supplier computers are  
3 coupled to a set of one or more server computers associated with the buyer organization over  
4 the public computer network, a method comprising:

5                 at least one server computer in the set of server computers, receiving a request  
6 to schedule a reverse auction based on an identified item to procure, wherein the reverse  
7 auction is to be conducted a selected number of days in the future;

8                 determining by the buyer organization whether to add additional requests for  
9 the identified item, based on the scheduled auction;

10                creating an electronic qualification plan to qualify the identified item;

11                approximately concurrently with creating a qualification plan, identifying  
12 suppliers to participate in the reverse auction, including suppliers associated with the two  
13 supplier computers;

14                approximately concurrently with identifying suppliers, creating an electronic  
15 request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to the identified item;

16                creating a draft electronic purchase order for the identified item before  
17 conducting the reverse auction;

18                at least one server computer in the set of server computers, electronically  
19 distributing the electronic RFQ to the at least two supplier computers over the public  
20 computer network;

21                conducting the reverse auction and identifying a winning supplier from the  
22 identified suppliers;

23                transitioning from an existing supplier to the winning supplier; and

24                at least one server computer in the set of server computers, providing the draft  
25 electronic purchase order to the winning supplier to at least procure a number of the  
26 identified items for executing the created qualification plan.

1           2.     The method of claim 1 wherein the public computer network is the  
2 World Wide Web, wherein the browser is a web browser, and  
3           wherein receiving a request to schedule a reverse auction comprises receiving  
4 input, from an electronic purchasing leader, to a web page electronic auction form;  
5           wherein determining whether to add additional requests for the identified item  
6 comprises automatically providing to a global commodity leader an electronic copy of the  
7 web page auction form, and determining whether suppliers in identified low cost geographic  
8 regions may participate;  
9           wherein conducting the reverse auction comprises, at an auction server  
10 computer in the set of server computers, electronically providing results of the reverse  
11 auction at an expiration of an auction duration;  
12           wherein providing the draft electronic purchase order to the winning supplier  
13 comprises creating an electronic purchase order at a purchasing system server computer in  
14 the set of server computers; and  
15           wherein the method further comprises, approximately concurrently with  
16 creating an electronic RFQ, electronically scheduling the reverse auction with an electronic  
17 auction support group.

1           3.     A system for facilitating item procurement from one of two or more  
2 suppliers, the system comprising:  
3           at least one server computer coupled to a database, wherein the server  
4 computer is configured to:  
5           receive a date when an auction is to be conducted, wherein the auction  
6 is for an item to be procured from one of the plurality suppliers, wherein the date is a  
7 selected number of days in the future and is stored in the database;  
8           before the date of the auction, provide at least a portion of an electronic  
9 qualification plan to qualify the item to be procured, wherein at least the portion of  
10 the electronic qualification plan is stored in the database;  
11           assist in the conducting the auction and obtaining winning bid from a  
12 winning supplier selected from the two or more suppliers; and

13 assist in procuring at least a number of the identified items from the  
14 winning supplier for executing the created qualification plan before a greater number  
15 of the identified items are procured from the winning supplier.

1 4. The system of claim 3 wherein assisting in conducting the auction  
2 comprises assisting in conducting an electronic reverse auction between a buyer computer  
3 associated with a buyer organization and supplier computers associated with the two or more  
4 suppliers, wherein a public computer network couples the buyer and supplier computers and  
5 the server computer; and

6 wherein the server computer is further configured to provide at least a portion  
7 of an electronic request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to the item to be procured, and  
8 distribute the electronic RFQ to the two or more supplier computers over the public computer  
9 network.

10 5. The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further configured  
11 to provide at least a portion of an electronic request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to  
12 the item to be procured, and distribute the electronic RFQ to the two or more suppliers.

13 6. The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further configured  
14 to provide notification to at least one member of a qualification team after the winning  
15 supplier is identified.

1 7. The system of claim 3 wherein assisting in conducting the auction  
2 comprises assisting in conducting an electronic reverse auction with supplier computers  
3 associated with the two or more suppliers, wherein the supplier computers are coupled to the  
4 server computer via the Internet.

1 8. A method of procuring items by a buyer organization from one of two or  
2 more suppliers, the method comprising:

3 identifying an item to procure from one of the two or more suppliers under an  
4 auction, wherein the auction is to be conducted a selected number of days in the future;

5 before conducting the auction, creating an electronic qualification plan to  
6 qualify the identified item;

7 conducting the auction and identifying a winning supplier from the two or  
8 more suppliers; and

9 procuring at least a number of the identified item from the winning supplier for  
10 executing the created qualification plan before procuring a greater number of the identified  
11 items from the winning supplier.

1 9. The method of claim 8 wherein conducting the auction includes  
2 conducting an electronic reverse auction between a buyer computer associated with the buyer  
3 organization and supplier computers associated with the two or more suppliers, wherein the  
4 buyer and supplier computers are coupled to a public computer network; and

5 wherein the method further comprises creating an electronic request for  
6 quotations ("RFQ") with respect to the identified item, and distributing the electronic RFQ to  
7 the two or more supplier computers over the public computer network.

8 10. A computer system comprising components configured to perform the  
9 method of claim 8.

1 11. A computer-readable generated data signal transmitted via a  
2 transmission channel, the generated data signal encoding contents that cause a computer to  
3 perform the method of claim 8.

4 12. The method of claim 8, further comprising: notifying at least one  
5 member of a qualification team after the winning supplier is identified.

6 13. The method of claim 8, further comprising:  
7 creating a request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to the identified item  
8 and distributing the RFQ to the at least two suppliers.

1 14. The method of claim 8, further comprising:  
2 creating a draft purchase order before conducting the auction.

1 15. A method of procuring items by a buyer organization from one of two or  
2 more supplier organizations, the method comprising the steps of:  
3 identifying an item to procure from one of the two or more supplier  
4 organizations under an auction;  
5 creating an electronic qualification plan to qualify the identified item;  
6 approximately concurrently with creating a qualification plan, identifying  
7 supplier organizations from the two or more supplier organizations to participate in the  
8 auction;  
9 approximately concurrently with identifying supplier organizations, creating a  
10 request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to the identified item;  
11 distributing the RFQ to the identified supplier organizations; and  
12 conducting the auction and identifying a winning supplier organization from  
13 the identified supplier organizations.

1 16. The method of claim 15, further comprising:  
2 creating a draft purchase order before conducting the auction.

1 17. The method of claim 15 wherein conducting the auction includes  
2 conducting an electronic reverse auction between a buyer computer associated with the buyer  
3 organization and supplier computers associated with the two or more supplier organizations,  
4 wherein the buyer and supplier computers are coupled to a public computer network; and  
5 wherein creating an RFQ comprises creating an electronic request for  
6 quotations with respect to the identified item and distributing the electronic RFQ to the two  
7 or more supplier computers over the public computer network.

1 18. A computer-readable medium storing computer-executable instructions,  
2 the instructions being capable of causing a computer to perform the method of claim 15.

1           19. The method of claim 15 wherein identifying supplier organizations  
2 includes identifying a set of potential supplier organizations from a larger set of supplier  
3 organizations, and approving at least some of the set of identified supplier organizations.

1           20. The method of claim 15 wherein creating an RFQ includes  
2 electronically distributing the RFQ for approval before distributing the RFQ.

1           21. A data signal encoding computer-executable instructions, the  
2 instructions defining a method of facilitating item procurement from one of two or more  
3 suppliers, the method comprising:

4           providing at least a portion of an electronic qualification plan to qualify an item  
5 to be procured under an auction;

6           receiving a set of supplier names identifying suppliers to participate in the  
7 auction, wherein the set of supplier names is selected from the two or more suppliers; and

8           providing at least a portion of a request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to  
9 the identified item, and wherein providing at least a portion of the RFQ is performed  
10 approximately concurrently with providing at least a portion of an electronic qualification  
11 plan or receiving a set of supplier names.

1           22. The data signal encoding computer-executable instructions of claim 21,  
2 further comprising:

3           creating a purchase order before conducting the auction.

1           23. The data signal encoding computer-executable instructions of claim 21,  
2 further comprising:

3           distributing the RFQ to the set of suppliers; and

4           conducting the auction and identifying a winning supplier from the set of  
5 suppliers.

1           24. A computer-readable medium storing the data signal of claim 21.

1           25.    The data signal encoding computer-executable instructions of claim 21  
2 wherein providing at least a portion of an electronic qualification plan includes receiving an  
3 initial number of the identified item to procure for testing.

1           26.    The data signal encoding computer-executable instructions of claim 21,  
2 further comprising:  
3           electronically distributing the RFQ for approval before conducting the auction;  
4 and  
5           electronically distributing the set of suppliers for approval before conducting  
6 the auction.

1           27.    A method of procuring items from one of two or more supplier  
2 organizations, the method comprising:

3           creating a request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to an item to procure  
4 from one of the two or more supplier organizations, wherein the item has been procured from  
5 an existing supplier organization;

6           identifying a set of supplier organizations selected from the two or more  
7 supplier organizations, wherein the set of supplier organizations are to participate in the  
8 auction;

9           distributing the RFQ to the set of identified supplier organizations;

10          conducting the auction and identifying a winning supplier organization from  
11 the set of identified supplier organizations; and

12          if the winning supplier organization is not the existing supplier organization,  
13 then transitioning from the existing supplier organization to the winning supplier  
14 organization, wherein the transitioning includes: procuring any existing numbers of the  
15 identified item the existing supplier organization has on hand; automatically generating an  
16 electronic message for at least the existing supplier regarding at least one reason why the  
17 winning supplier won the auction; or, procuring a number of the identified item from the  
18 existing supplier organization to permit uninterrupted transitioning to the winning supplier  
19 organization under an automated procurement system ("MRP system").

1           28. A computer-readable, medium storing instructions causing a computer  
2 to assist in procuring items by a buyer organization from one of two or more supplier  
3 organizations, comprising:

4           receiving a request to schedule an auction based on an identified item to  
5 purchase, wherein the auction is to be conducted a selected number of days in the future;

6           determining by the buyer organization whether to add additional requests for  
7 the identified item, based on the scheduled auction and based on additional need for the  
8 identified item within the business organization;

9           creating a request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to an item to procure  
10 from one of the two or more supplier organizations;

11           identifying a set of supplier organizations from the two or more supplier  
12 organizations to participate in the auction;

13           distributing the RFQ to the identified set of supplier organizations; and

14           conducting the auction and identifying a winning supplier organization from  
15 the identified set of supplier organizations.

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1           34. A system to assist in procuring items for a business organization from  
2 one of two or more suppliers, comprising:

3           means for receiving a request to schedule an auction based on an identified  
4 item to purchase and an identified quantity, wherein the auction is to be conducted a selected  
5 number of days in the future; and

6           means for determining whether to increase the identified quantity for the item  
7 based on the scheduled auction and based on additional need for the identified item within  
8 the business organization.

35. The system of claim 34, further comprising:

1           means for creating a request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to the item to  
2 procure from one of the two or more suppliers;

3           means for identifying a select number of suppliers from the two or more  
4 suppliers to participate in the auction;

5           means for distributing the RFQ to the identified suppliers; and

6           means for conducting the auction and identifying a winning supplier from the  
7 identified suppliers.  
8

1           36. The system of claim 34, further comprising:

2           means for creating a qualification plan to qualify the identified item before  
3 conducting the auction.

1           37. The system of claim 34, further comprising:

2           means for creating a request for quotations ("RFQ") with respect to the item to  
3 procure from one of the two or more suppliers; and

4           means for identifying a select number of suppliers from the two or more  
5 suppliers to participate in the auction, wherein the means for creating the RFQ and means for  
6 identifying supplier operate approximately concurrently.